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Unruly urbanisation on Delhi's fringe

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Unruly urbanisation on Delhi's fringe

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Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

Unruly urbanisation on Delhi's fringe

changing patterns of land use and livelihood

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PREFACE

As a child I was fascinated by a poster series that was hanging in the orthodontist's waiting room. The first in this series of very realistic drawings depicted a little peaceful farm; subsequent pictures showed it becoming engulfed by construction sites, then enclosed by roads, then crowded with buildings, and eventually overwhelmed by skyscrapers and highways. The green pastures ultimately had to make way for the urban monster and bow to modernisation. The little farm is no more. I used to wonder what happened to the (victimised?) farmer. Although the posters were meant to evoke pity for a defeated idyllic rural situation, I could not help but feel impressed by the urban jungle. I never imagined that I would spend more than four years doing research on a topic so close to that series of images. I thank Delhi for satisfying my wildest dreams about experiencing an 'urban jungle'.

Given the chance to do research in India, I felt a mix of high expectations and weak knees. The theme and setting were very appealing. I had already done the research for my MA thesis there, and with that experience behind me, I was not stepping into something totally unknown. The challenge was to combine aspects of urbanisation, the environment, and the livelihood of the people into a single investigation. The cross-disciplinary character of doing this research in a then exotic setting often puzzled me – and it certainly puzzled others I tried to explain the multiple facets of land and life in a rural-urban fringe. I hope that if this thesis does not synthesise everything, it will at least demonstrate a good comprehension of the local situation.

Although India can be a tough place, for a researcher it was very pleasant. The urbanising villages have retained that warm hospitality that characterises rural India. Almost all of the respondents were generous with their time. Non-responders were few and far between. Therefore, first and foremost, my sincere thanks go to the villagers and others who have welcomed me with tea, local sweets, lunches and even one or more night's stay but, most importantly, with insightful and usually honest answers to our questions.

I am grateful to several people in Groningen for the important roles they have played: my supervisor and co-promotor Peter Druijven for acquiring the IDPAD project and for his continued capable and committed guidance; my promotor Piet Pellenbarg for providing practical feedback as well as very useful support of a more general academic nature; Jan Dekker for sharing his vast experience and helping re-interpret facts once they had been stripped of opportunist, fashionable, and politically correct academic biases – his trademark; and Dirk Strijker for enthusiastically taking up the guidance of a fieldwork student from the Department of Economics.

Doing PhD research can be a lonely affair. I was lucky to be accompanied to the field by colleagues from Delhi, who assisted in the interpretation – and I don't only mean their help in crossing the language barrier. I could also count on them for feedback and suggestions about the research approach. Besides, during the many long fieldwork days, we built up lasting friendships. I thank Rajeev Sharma, Prakash Mondal, and Jagmohan for their companionship. Dr. R.B. Singh provided a home base at the University of Delhi. I am happy that I could work with Surinder Aggarwal and Vineet Katariya in an enjoyable mode of co-operation on the study of Samaipur. I thank Mr. Bachi Ram for giving me some cartographic advice along the way. Mr. Yoginder Singh prepared a good

summary in Hindi. Some rural-urban fringe residents really went out of their way to help me; I would particularly like to thank Tejbir Singh Rana, Satya Prakash, the Tyagi family, Niranjana Kaushik, Ashwini Rana, and Dr. P.V. Khatri.

It has been both gratifying and fruitful that eight students from my institute could take part in the research. It was a learning experience for all of us. I particularly want to thank them for conducting basic household surveys and for bringing depth to the following topics in the fringe villages: land prices (Casper van Nassau), women's work (Wendy Warnar), women and environment (Natasja Stamsnieder), commuting (Jan Postmus), industrial location and work (Robert-Jan Lassche), housing (Constanze Cromwell), migration (Taeke Gjaltema), and industrial labour migration (Joost van der Geest).

I was also fortunate that the opportunity arose to work together with Arjen de Vries and Jan Skornsek on remote sensing and GIS, mostly on memorable Fridays. Apart from taking advantage of their indispensable expertise, I drew inspiration from a bond that grew among friends at a similar stage in our careers. I also appreciate the actual computer-related support provided by Jan de Ruiter, Henk Oosterhoff, Wim Blanken, Johan Zwart, Theo Smit, Joop Arnolli. Tamara Kaspers-Westra, thanks for making so many maps. And Jon Ubbink, thanks for the instructions regarding statistics. I am grateful to Nancy Smyth van Weesep for the thorough and very professional correction of my English. Jaap Sibma, thanks for the strict yet fair treatment of financial and accommodation matters. With all of my roommates at the department – Rens Kern, Ruud Dorenbos, George van der Weij, Esther de Boer, Bert Liewes, and Hilko van der Wal – I have shared good comradeship. Among the friends who were helpful and inspiring in other ways, I would like to mention Edmond Varwijk, Kees Lazonder, Daan Groeneveld, en Sabu Padmadas.

Happiness and peace of mind are necessary preconditions for preserving such an unnatural and long process as writing a dissertation. The support of my family was crucial in helping me overcome the dips and insecurities of this long-distance run – especially in the final stages: thanks! My gratitude also goes to my family in India, who showed an extraordinary degree of interest and trust. Although finishing this book feels pretty good, the best outcome of my sojourn in Delhi is my marriage with Shilpa. Shilpa, your love, trust, and the comfort you have so generously given have been essential – not only for finishing the book, but also for making this period such an enriching and enjoyable enterprise.